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*THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLATO AS A MEDITATION  
ON DEATH*

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It is of the philosophy of Plato that I would write, but I would keep in mind a definition of philosophy given by Plato himself when he spoke of it as "meditation on death." I would write, too, not of any inner details of what Plato thought, but of his teaching in its general character and value; and especially, on behalf of my readers, I would assume that, for their purposes as well as always for my own, no fair estimate and no vital appreciation of Plato or his meditation can ever be attained without some understanding of the place of Plato and his philosophy in the history of his very remarkable people, the ancient Greeks, and of their dead civilization.

As an ancient Greek Plato belonged to the fifth century before Christ. He was, furthermore, a great philosopher who possessed the genius of a poet and very unusual powers of intellect, being, what is certainly rare in human history, as clear and discriminating in his thinking as he was far and penetrating in his vision. In philosophical standpoint he was an idealist, whatever his sort of idealism may prove to be; and to his idealism he was in large measure inspired by the life and teaching and martyrdom of Socrates. As to this last matter, however, the very greatness and significance of Socrates lay in his embodiment and dramatic, prophetic enactment of the hurrying fate of his race and their civilization. The times being what they were, and rooted as they were in a glorious past, spoke deeply and grandly through the words, and even more eloquently through the final silence, of Socrates to the poet-thinker Plato.

What it means in human history for a civilization to have produced a great poet-thinker, a man who is at once a seer and a keenly discriminating critic, and into whose life, along with his thinker's genius and poetic vision, such a searching, harrowing,

personal experience as the condemnation and death of a master and leader has entered, must always tax as well as inspire the imagination. Yet when all is said, for the history of Greek civilization the meaning is to be found in the consciousness of the poet-thinker himself: it is well focussed in the peculiar idealism of Plato; and, accordingly, to just that, to its various sources, personal as well as historical, to its character as a reflection and a comment on the past and as a foreshadowing of the future, attention is now asked.

Idealism is very far from being a self-defining term, and at least to understand Plato's idealism, it is necessary to foresee what for many the term is quite likely to obscure, not only that any idealism must always have both a forward and a backward regard, but also that a true and vital idealism is always heroic and sacrificial: it is never shallowly sentimental. An idealism like Plato's is always a victory of the human spirit over a threatening and well-grounded pessimism. It is indeed a meditation, a successful meditation, on death. Did Plato himself mean the death of Socrates? Or, possibly, the approaching death of the Greek civilization? Doubtless both deaths, if they really count as two, influenced and inspired his thinking, and certainly both must help any understanding of Plato's victory over events and conditions that gave good cause for despair.

There is not space here for any long account of the grounds in Athenian or more generally in Greek life, or even in Plato's own direct personal experience, for a dark, despairing view of life; but, while many historians call the time one of great illumination, and while only a few years before there had been the Golden Age, the age of the famous Perikles, when civic pride and splendor and achievement of the highest sort had possession of the people, nevertheless life must always have its paradoxes, and that age of the illumination was really a dark, or at least a rapidly darkening, one.

Brilliant civilizations always spring from conquests; in part from conquests over men and in part, if the two can be separated, from conquests over nature, and certainly the rise of the Greeks' civilization was no exception to this simple rule. In Greek history,

before Plato's time, had come those battles, once if not still the wonder and delight of every school-boy, Thermopylae, Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea. But after battles and their successes, inevitable conceit; and the conceit, which expresses itself, of course, in self-consciousness and self-glorification, in works of art, in sensuously pleasing literature, in all the many ways of staging one's achievement, has the effect of making a naïve, genuine, simple, honest life sophisticated and artificial, rendering patriotism and religious piety and morality, and even the life of artistic production and intellectual inquiry, formal rather than real, cultivated—a very meaningful term—rather than direct and immediately genuine. In a single word, the conceit makes for culture; and culture, brilliant as it may become, must always betray tradition, transforming the once sacred institutions of all sorts from objects of positive devotion into mere instruments or utilities. For a cultivated life, by implication when not openly and confessedly, the traditional patriotism, piety, and morality already are, or are in process of becoming, things to use or wear or publicly to appear in rather than things to own and cherish deeply and heartily or to be essentially. Thus Plato's age, as both Socrates and he have told us in so many ways, was an age that was illuminated, talented, cultivated, but also that was given to an enthusiasm for manner and successful appearance in all things, ever exalting seeming above being.

Perhaps in human history it is the peculiar business of culture always to do just that; perhaps the established ways of a particular civilization, in the interests of a progressive history, need to be turned into mere forms without substance, conventions rather than vital interests; perhaps in history, as in personal experience, it is well that the things for a time supposed real should come to have the character of only passing dreams, however splendid; but, be this as it may, Athenian life in the time of Plato, bright focus that it was of Greek civilization, had become a grand show, a splendid dream; a life that was more ingenious than genuine, more subtle than substantial or responsible, more given to technique, fashion, and display than to righteousness.

And so we can feel the darkness in that age of Greek enlightenment; since betrayal of tradition can have no end save the

passing, the death, of the civilization into which it has come. That age of culture had its chiaroscuro effects. The cultured or cultivated patriotism was shadowed by a more or less treacherous cosmopolitanism; the cultured piety by a growing indifference to real belief; the cultured, sophisticated morality by a loosening of the customs and restraints of the time; the cultivated, professional art by playing to unreasoning passion; and the consciously technical science and philosophy by a fondness for sophistry and intellectual gymnastic. In short, successful battles; conceit and self-glorification; a golden, albeit a sunset-golden age, in which life was staged in wonderful works of art and thereupon robbed of its mystery; and an exaggerated culture, that turned life formal and artificial—such is the history of the Greeks down to Plato's time; and in this history who must not feel, with Socrates and Plato, a coming, if not even, in spite of the outward brilliancy, an already present, gloom?

Not least among the causes for a deep despair was the widespread selfishness. Thus, as but an incident of the artificiality that permeated the life of the time making the existing organization of society little better than an empty shell, the individual had come to stand for more than the class or the institution, or than any of the customs, ideas, or ideals that held the people in classes or gave foundation to the institutions. The life as actually formed or organized was treated as no longer intrinsically worthy, but as only so much personal opportunity, supplying the individual with the means, the definite instruments or conditions, with which, as he was subtle and ingenious, while all the time seeming loyal and respectable, he might work out his own selfish ends. The culture had truly brought a treachery to tradition, and behind the only outward loyalty which survived for a time the reigning motive was selfishness. Moreover, as needs especially to be kept in mind, at that time, as always when individualism has supplanted patriotism and loyalty to the established life, the individual, throwing off the old restraints (except of course as he found the appearance of compliance with them to serve his purposes), was feeling himself—there seems to be no better way of expressing his feeling—just big, nay, swollen, with the life of the whole world. Was he a Greek? Of course, but

consciously and boastfully, not a prudish one. In fact the Greek life was only the garb he wore so well or the brilliant part he was taking on life's much larger stage. Surely he was a citizen of the wide world, at least as wide as the reaches of the Mediterranean; and he was, too, nature's creature, not a bondsman of the codes of a merely local, however glorious, civilization. Yes, the selfishness, the individualism, of Plato's time, must always be associated with that cosmopolitanism which was mentioned above as the dark side of the patriotism in Plato's Athens. Yet perhaps—to digress a little—such a broad, free selfishness, always doing violence to custom, always secretly, if not openly, opposing the authority of the institutions, is also always only a jumping from one set of associations and restraints into another, which, although broader, may—or even must—prove more binding. The broadly natural life to which the selfish man so boastfully turns, after all is said, is truly a harder master, a closer and more inviolate association, than any positive civilization has ever been; and the destiny of the cosmopolitan individualism of Athens, when in the fulness of time that destiny had been accomplished, was a demonstration of this truth. But, returning, the selfishness in Plato's Athens, however affected with the conceit of cosmopolitanism, and because of the cosmopolitanism however promising of good or of ill for the future, could appear to Plato only as one more sign of a threatening doom.

Was Athens unhappy? Athens does not seem to have been unhappy. If the simple arithmetic of her joys and her sorrows could be worked out, the balance would probably be on the side of a good time. Certainly the people attended the performances of the comedies of Aristophanes quite as readily as those of the tragedies of Sophocles. The age, then, had its pleasure as well as its illumination; its gayety, especially at night, a modern who was also a bit of a poet might add, as well as its glaring electric light. Nor can one forget that selfishness, even at its worst, is always stimulating. Of course it prompts dissipation and lawlessness, but also—and with recognition of this the gloom of its time and generation must seem almost to lift a little—it prompts leadership, invention, originality; it assures to a people the birth of genius; it may betray tradition even as it flaunts its brilliant cul-

ture; but certainly it involves just the loosening of restraints that enables invention and progress.

Accordingly the good time of the Athenians could not have been without some sense of the deeper, hidden possibilities of the life which they were leading so carelessly. So often the real zest of gayety, the impulse to its brilliancy, springs from a seriousness that only lacks the courage of expression, or that for some other reason chooses to conceal itself; and, if Athens was as happy as she seemed, her happiness must have had some of this deeper zest. Her citizens certainly were selfish; but, if in Plato's age their selfishness produced the treacherous dissipated Alcibiades, it also produced Socrates. The chiaroscuro effects of that time of culture and treachery, of selfishness and enjoyment, were thus such as to make the light and the shade actually change places even as one looked.

As already said, and as is indeed very generally known, the influence of Socrates upon Plato was very great, and especially the reflection on Socrates's death was one of the determining factors of Plato's heroic idealism. But now what precisely was Socrates's relation to the culture of the time? In general the contemporary writers and thinkers and teachers, all the various exponents of the intellectual life, possessed only talent. They had the art, the skill or ingenuity, of successfully maintaining the conventional life of the day, even while they served their own or their clients' personal desires. Plato's master, however, was a genius, and genius occupies itself not with the conventional, but with the real, not with the selfishness that works through successful appearance, but with the selfishness that works through successful realization. So long as life must be in part always hidden behind its forms, so long as it cannot in its full meaning and intent be explicit, so long as besides the outward and conventional there must be also the inward and vital, genius and its searching originality, as well as talent and its subtle but superficial ingenuity, will have a place and a part in human history. So, again, Socrates was a genius, and it was his peculiar mission, meeting like with like, selfishness with selfishness, treachery with treachery, and above all cosmopolitanism with cosmopolitanism,

to disclose what was real in the life of the people at large but hidden from view, or what perhaps in a spirit of laughing bravado all others were bent on not seeing and truly appreciating. While that reality could be kept under, concealed behind the pretence of loyal Greek life, the irresponsible selfishness, which was already cosmopolitan but in a careless, unideal way, could go on; the Hellenic laughter and the brilliancy and the play could continue; but let the vital fact, the hidden reality, be revealed beyond possibility of concealment and indifference, and it would at once become, what Socrates made it, an object of duty, a recognized and measured responsibility; and with such a change the easy cosmopolitanism of the selfish, fashionable, brilliant Athenians would turn positive and serious. Their friendships could no longer follow convenience; nor their argument, desire; nor their piety, outward conformity; nor their patriotism, fine rhetoric and oratory and public display; but instead all these would be made, in the first place, real and vital, and, in the second place, as far-reaching in their commands and restraints as humanity itself, affecting and embracing the barbarians as well as the Greeks. Simply Socrates effectively revealed and idealized the universal life which so unmindfully his people were already living. There is always idealization, with an accompanying consciousness of duty, whenever something that is real and present is made manifest through somebody's personal achievement.

It is necessary to speak still further of Socrates, although the theme here is the philosophy of Plato. Grote in his *History of Greece* has described Socrates in three ways: an apostolic dialectician, a religious worker, and an intellectual genius. The term dialectician has reference to the very searching character of Socrates's inquiries, to his well-known method of dialogue and destructive cross-questioning, but the last two characterizations are of special interest in this place. As has been said, Socrates disclosed to his times the fact, already too real to withstand resistance, of a cosmopolitan or humanly universal life; and Grote very pertinently insists that Socrates's achievement was with the consciousness of one who felt himself a divinely



appointed messenger. Moreover, proving his religious devotion by his martyrdom, Socrates succeeded in making the people, however reluctantly, feel, no longer their license and selfishness, but their duty, their positive allegiance, to be humanly universal, to be larger and deeper than the idle culture, however brilliant, that was still keeping up the pretence of loyalty to a passing regime. In witness to such an awakening, the death of Socrates was followed by influential schools of ethics that, although immature in their doctrines, nevertheless under the inspiration of Socrates raised questions of life's goal, of its *summum bonum*, and suggested solutions that rested on universal elements in man's nature rather than on anything narrowly personal or racial.

But now with special regard to Plato's relation to Socrates, when Grote describes Socrates as an intellectual genius, and says in explanation that Socrates discovered the abstract, general idea, the conception, he may be calling attention to what is somewhat technical and difficult, but certainly he is touching upon what deeply and directly appealed to Plato. Plato's philosophy comprised chiefly—it had its focus in—a world, or heaven, of the ideas, of just those ideas which Socrates had discovered; so that only after a careful appraisal of those ideas can one understand either the connection between Socrates, the religious missionary of the universal life, and Socrates the intellectual genius, or the peculiar use that Plato made of what Socrates achieved.

The ideas which Socrates's genius discovered and out of which Plato constructed his philosopher's world were manifestly more than ordinary states of mind or consciousness. They had even the character of things, except that they were not such things as we see about us. Those ideas were of a matter, or substance, not seen with eyes nor felt with hands. Their substance, however, is really of much less moment than their character or meaning, just as one might say of souls that what they are really for is more important than what they are made of. The Socratic or Platonic idea, then, in value or meaning was, to use a homely metaphor, merely a nail on which to hang the fact of universality, as well as all the essential implications of it, which was so present and active in the cosmopolitanism of the time, and which Socrates made the great object of his mission. Only, being an

intellectual genius as well as a religious reformer, with the consequent thoroughness of an active, deeply searching mind, Socrates saw all things natural as well as all things human from the standpoint of universality, which is to say, from the standpoint of the "idea." The peculiar trees and stones, the peculiar natural objects of all sorts in any time, in any country, as well as the peculiar human customs and institutions, must be said to be local and temporal, to be provincial; and as these can hardly be conscious for themselves, a great thinker, broad enough and deep enough, sooner or later must become conscious for them, exactly as Socrates was conscious, not merely for the institutions of his people but for all things in their experience. Can you not imagine some olive-tree near Athens brought to the critical moment of asking what a tree truly is, just as the Greek in the city was asking what truly is a man, and with the inquiry made conscious of the opposition between itself—olives, branches, and all—and the universal nature that must embrace all trees, past present and future? Can you not imagine this at just the time when the Greek was feeling himself to be only a part, however important, in a universal humanity? Man has such a habit, as irresistible as it is effective, of reading his whole world, of seeing every thing and object in that world, in his own image, in the light of his own experience; and so at the time of Socrates, and particularly in the person of Socrates, we find man awakening to a cosmopolitanism, not merely for his own immediate human affairs, the various devices of his civilization, but also for every single object in the whole sphere of his life. As the leader, then, in that awakening, as one capable, so to speak, of thinking for the trees and the stones, for the things organic and the things inorganic, of his time, as well as for the things visibly and formally human and social, Socrates was indeed, in the simple but pregnant phrase of Grote, "an intellectual genius." Many men, overcoming a too easy provincialism, are capable of attaining to the feeling, if not to the insight, of a universal humanity; but most need a Socrates to convince them that such a feeling or such an insight pertains to the whole realm of nature. What, too, is intellectual genius, if not a human sympathy with what is not human?

Those who have read Plato's wonderful dialogues have found

him constantly representing Socrates as a seeker after the true definitions of things. What, for example, is justice? Or what is a table or a tree? And always Socrates concludes that no definition can ever be adequate to the real or full nature of anything whatsoever. It is a common saying that life is not definable; but Socrates goes farther, only carrying this notion to its legitimate outcome, insisting that not a single fact or incident of life is definable. All things are what they are. Justice is not in kindness to friends nor in care of the feeble in mind or body; it is larger and deeper than any specific relation; it is, then, really and fully, simply and comprehensively, justice. And man is not Greek nor barbarian, not friend nor foe; man is man; man, as he is to be found the whole world over and all history through. The tree is neither olive nor fir, but just nature's tree, as invisible and indefinable as it is universal and eternal. *The tree or the man or the justice* is just that invisible reality, call it what you will, force or principle or spirit or idea, in which the things visible and definite, the things provincial, live and move and have their being.

Great thoughts at first reading are likely to seem meaningless, if not positively absurd. Perhaps the reason for this is that greatness is always free from pretence. To have discovered a world, for example, in which things, being indefinable, are just what they are, are just deeply and fully themselves, to have said only that what is, is, may show a great faith, but also it seems decidedly simple-minded. Yet such simple-mindedness becomes glorified when with second thought one appreciates that the seemingly empty definitions are marks of the deepest possible reverence for reality. You are you and I am I, and no one of us would be satisfied with having his nature defined more narrowly than that. So defined, we feel in ourselves the possibilities of all things. So defined, our natures remain infinite. Any definition more specific, making you perhaps mere readers of a certain book and me only the author, would certainly compromise our true, full reality; and Socrates, an intellectual genius, widely and deeply sympathetic, revered reality with a religious reverence, and refused accordingly to compromise the reality of anything. In short, as if a great explorer, Socrates discovered a new world,

profoundly real, a world in which all things, just because invisible and indefinable, were their infinite selves—the world of the ideas. Truly, death would be gain as Socrates suggested, if it insured passage thither; and by its discovery Socrates proved himself, in the fullest sense, a missionary of the universal life.

But Plato, the poet-thinker, with his mind's senses perceived this world, the world of ideas, as probably Socrates never perceived it. Socrates believed in it; explorer that he was, he even reached its borders and led others thither; but Plato, while yet living, had the vision of it, and had the vision so clearly as to be able to portray it for all time. Doubtless Plato's training, so different from that of the humbly born Socrates, being the best that wealth and position and culture could provide, greatly supplemented his native ability for this work, making him equal to the imagination and artistic creation which such a portrayal exacted, but with Plato, as with us all, it was death that made that new world, the world of the ideas, so real, and for his mind's eye so clearly visible. In the to him peculiarly clear reality of that world to which Socrates finally passed, Plato had his answer to, his emotional as well as his intellectual consolation for, the loss of his master. Has death ever failed, after its first pain, to open men's eyes to what is not visible and to inspire their lips or their pens to what has been inexpressible?

The world of ideas, then, which Socrates discovered, was very real to Plato; it was as real or as "concrete" as a picture, or, better, as the world that you and I see when we look about us. We are accustomed to see, as we go on our way, only all sorts of particular objects and people, but Plato saw—what a vision was his!—the types or seeds, the universal realities, the infinite potentialities, of which the little things of our customary consciousness are only very uncertain reminders. Each one of those seeds or types, each one of those ideas, was as if a centre, or focus, for all the different members of its class throughout all time; and in the world of them all, in the world of those infinitely pregnant seeds, Plato walked seeing. Presumably any man might walk there, too, if he would; but walking there and seeing as Plato saw are not very common.

Today we have a name for Plato's world of the infinite seeds of all things. We call that world by no less a name than nature, although we are not commonly alive to the deepest meaning of the word. Nature, moreover, is very real and present. But Plato's real world was a world apart, a heavenly place, and it is quite pertinent to ask why? Too easy is the reply, so often accepted, that Plato was but foreshadowing a Christian view. Of course Christianity has long conceded to a few pagans such foresight, and Christian apologists have often relied on Plato as well as on other Socratic philosophers, for support of their various theses. This good old Christian reply, however, while not without point, is far from sufficient. To the question asked the direct answer must come from Plato's own experience or from the times determining that experience. Plato's doctrine was his own. His doctrine of a real world, the world of the real ideas, as a world apart, immaterial as well as sensuously invisible, was just his protest against the obstinate conventionalism of his time, the wholly degenerate conservatism, which by allowing selfish motives and jealousies to prevail, by subjecting justice to personal spite, had brought Socrates to his death. To Plato, as hinted already, the death of Socrates was but a focus, in an intimate personal relation, for conditions involving the whole fabric of the life of the time; and, to add to what has already been said of these conditions, the notorious failures of certain Athenian enterprises, notably the overwhelming disaster of the Sicilian expeditions, due to selfishness and corruption, and numerous acts, publicly scandalous, of political treachery, of impiety and of immorality, had their certain effect on Plato's mind. His own personal disappointment, too, when his hopes and efforts to establish on earth an ideal commonwealth came to naught, must have been very much like the proverbial last straw. In a word, the life of the time, both in many of its outward expressions and in its inner conditions, and Plato's own personal relations to this life, were such as to turn him, successor to Socrates as he was and genius in his own right as also he was, to a poet's idealism, to a vision of another world, to a life that, just because of its reality, could not be Athenian, or for that matter natural or earthly on any plan.

Socrates died, and almost at once Plato, his devoted pupil, also left Athens. Subsequently returning in body, not in spirit, he founded the Academy, and so effectively took philosophy and the world of philosophy out of the life of affairs, out of the streets and public places, where Socrates, the public nuisance, had for a time kept it. Then, writing those wonderful dialogues, he dramatized the master's life and teaching, presenting them, no longer in the market-place, but in a book or books, and in this manner making the way of philosophy a way of retirement from the world; and, as dialogue after dialogue appeared, as Plato's poet-thinker's genius grew into the fulness of its power, only expressing in theory what already he was practising for himself and others, he ideally constructed his real world, a world apart, the heaven of the ideas, to which Socrates had already journeyed, and in which Plato himself—such was the power of his poet's imagination—had come more and more truly and confidently to live.

Plato's vision of another world was thus more than an interesting pagan anticipation of the Christian belief in heaven. So to view it would be to make it only accidental or miraculous; a result that would neither bring credit to Plato nor deepen the truth of Christianity. It was indeed an anticipation, but also it was, as said already, Plato's own answer to, his very natural defence against, that blindly obstinate, brutally selfish, ingenious but not genuine, conservatism of his time. His other-world realism was relative to the persistent unrealism at Athens. It was, again, just his cry of victory, his triumph over the despair, deeply evident to him, of Greek civilization.

A heroic philosophy, then, a heroic, sacrificial, idealism; not shallowly sentimental, but deeply reflective; a triumphant "meditation on death"—such was the philosophy of Plato. In a separate world of ideas, of the eternal, infinitely teeming seeds or principles or spirits of all things, he found assurance when not only the death and the disaster, but also even the glitter and the brilliancy, about him suggested despair. And, more than this, as remains now to be observed, in a way not yet remarked the idealism of Plato was a triumphant reflection on death. With a meaning that will speedily appear it was triumphantly retrospective. It was

also triumphantly prophetic. The idea had been supreme once. It would be supreme again.

In the *Phaedrus* there is one of the most famous of Plato's so-called myths, and in this myth, where Plato (or Socrates) is describing the course of the souls in their chariots through the Heaven of What Verily Is, we read: "There follow . . . souls, which all do strive after that which is above, but are not able to reach unto it, and are carried around sunken beneath the face of heaven, trampling upon one another, and running against one another, and pressing on for to outstrip one another, with mighty great sound of tumult and sweat of the race; and here by reason of the unskillfulness of the charioteers, many souls are maimed, and many have their wings broken; and all, greatly travailing, depart uninitiated, not having seen That Which Is, and turn them to the food of opinion." So in effect has Plato given something very like to an account of the fall of man. The wreck of those chariots threw the souls of men from heaven to earth, from the realm of pure vision, of true knowledge, to the place of mere opinion; and, if the reader will recall how the history of a civilization is always a passing from the naïve, pure-minded life to a life of sophistication and intrigue, or say even from the spirituality of childhood to the complexity and artificiality, the sensuality and worldliness, of maturity, he will see, too, how the rise of a civilization, exactly like that of the Greeks, always must bring a fall of man. It brings a time when there is peculiar point in the thought, as expressed in at least one place, that except as men become as little children they may not enter the kingdom. Plato's ideas, then, being the direct evidence of That Which Is, were as if reminiscences from the time before the fall, from the childhood of his race. They were the pure, inarticulate spirits of all things, with which, to one looking back, the life of long ago must seem to have been informed, or by which, with the unconsciousness of a child, it must have been originally inspired and directed. Plato made much of reminiscence as a way to truth, his ideas were all native to men's minds, but lost or forgotten or obscured by the fall, and in many places he wrote of a Golden Age in the remote past; so that, in his world of ideas, as he set it out before him and made it an object of belief, one can see him

only taking as still real the high estate, the clear vision, the wise and simple life, of his people's long ago. Man ever seeks what man has lost. If only again he could be what once he was! If only he could return to that time in his past when, his vision being clear, all things were possible to him.

Accordingly memory had its share in Plato's victory. But the simple, purified, all-powerful spirit of the past, a spirit which, being informed with every one of the ideas of Plato's world, was very real, and was loaded with infinite possibilities for all things in man's experience, had another value besides its character as a comforting memory—a memory that seemed to Plato even to reach back into another world. Its very reality, when coupled with its separation or liberation from the formal life to which man had fallen and in whose subtle and alluring brilliancy man had been lost for a time, gave a peculiar confidence for the future. The long ago and the hereafter have ever been the same region and the same life. A true spirit of the past, a vital idea, any commanding ideal, is always both that which has heretofore given life its real worth—being, as upon its discovery men so often say, what really and truly they have been meaning all the time—and that which henceforth is to be lived up to. A vital idea, just like any idea in Plato's world, as it is truly freed from the restraints of form and tradition, as it is put where it can be real and not merely relative, universal and not particular, is always motive as well as memory, being a deeply appreciative projection of the broad spirit of the past into the future. Recall that Plato's ideas have already been described not only as the principles, or spirits, but also as the infinite potentials, of all things. As potentials, those ideas, being also unassailably real, were as truly earnest of the future as witnesses of the past. Recall, also, how in personal experience one's memories always both give freedom from the formal restraints of the present life and inform the life that lies before with its vital purpose. No motives are ever so impelling, so productive or creative, as life's old, old stories.

Moreover a realism, a realistic idealism, such as Plato's, though it find reality only in a separate world of ideas, cannot be wholly opposed, or negative, to what is present and manifest. In some



sense and measure the revealed hereafter must already actually move with some power in the present life. It may look askance at the form or structure of the life that is; but from the life itself, from the general spirit and intent to which the existing structure is simply become no longer adequate, it cannot hold itself wholly aloof. Indeed the more realistic, the more confident, an other-world realism such as Plato's becomes, the more it is bound to make some concessions of worth and reality to the world now and here. Similarly we have often been told that fully to believe in heaven is to believe that "now is the accepted time," that the present, not merely the long ago or the hereafter, and this world, not merely the other world, belong to it. A philosopher, too, must always regard reality as a theologian has to regard God. The real faith of the philosopher, like the faith of the theologian, is seriously compromised if its object cannot take all things, even the things that seem unreal or that seem quite unworthy, unto itself. Surely there is nothing quite so hospitable as faith, nothing so capable of compassing all things. And this need, so essential to perfect faith, of making its object hospitable to all things, gets peculiar force and worth, when the object, the reality, present to the vision, is felt to have, as Plato's ideas had, the value of a reminiscence. Though the believer's fall from reality may have been great, such a feeling gives not merely the assurance, already alluded to here, of still really and truly meaning well, but also a sense of still having something worthy to do, and—which is more—of still being able to do it. With regard, then, to that Greek life to which Plato was writing, civilizations are very like men: even at the moment of their darkest degradation they do acquire faith. Their faith, moreover, always born of memory, refuses to be merely in a separate, ideal world; for the very reality of the ideal brings it into the life of the world that here and now is, and makes it inspire this life with hope, and what is more, with a motive to renewed action and with a real power for action.

In Plato's heroic idealism, therefore, one may expect to find, what certainly one does find, that he triumphed over his pessimism; his belief dispelling despair, not by wholly excluding the conditions or causes of the latter, but by heroically taking the

latter up into the former. Perhaps Plato's triumph was not as complete as this would imply, but the ideas, although the realities of a world that stood apart, in a genuine sense were real also here and now; they were real and active at least in men's minds as always loving truth and in men's wills as always seeking reality. The souls of men "all do strive after that which is above," although "by reason of the unskilfulness of the charioteers many souls are maimed." Plato's idealism was thus at least sufficiently confident, his fiction was sufficiently superior to any visible fact, to save him from condemning this world, including Athens, to hopeless error and despair, and then setting over against it another world of sheer truth and perfection. His faith was deeper and stronger than is ever possible to any such crude dualism; and at least he went so far, besides recognizing the striving of all men, as also to teach that all the formally visible things of this world in some measure participated in the nature of the realities of the other, and that man accordingly, perceiving these things or acting with reference to them, however limited or "maimed" his vision, was still not wholly ignorant nor wholly evil. True, the things seen were but shadows of the real ideas, the eternal "principles"; but therein lay some ground of hope; and Plato firmly established the hope when he placed in earthly creatures, however fallen, that aspiration or striving to the "Heaven of What Verily Is."

That aspiration is the love, the "Platonic love," of which Plato wrote so often and so earnestly, and of which others since his day, more given to romance than to either history or philosophy, have often written so loosely. In their worldly, sensuous lives men truly are creatures of opinion and of quite superficial convention; but, very much as habit, even when judged bad, must still show devotion, though a misguided and misapplied devotion, to law and order, to uniformity and consistency, even so opinion, though false, must really love true knowledge, and convention, however hollow, must itself feel its inevitable ennui and yearn for what is real and substantial. "Love," said Plato in the *Symposium*, "is the name of our desire and pursuit for what is whole," and again, "Love is the desire of having the good always for one's own"; and while Plato summed all up with the doctrine that

philosophy is complete life, it is to be added that the love which inspired philosophy was alive, though not always well nurtured, in every man. All opinion, then, at least loves the truth; all artificiality at least craves reality; and such love or such craving saves even the life that is degenerate, giving it soul, imparting to it at least a good will, making even it real and active with the reality and activity of the ideal.

To an honest faith, evidently, to the faith of a realistic idealist like Plato, who could not but defy his own dualism, nothing here or anywhere can be so false or so bad that it is not at least potentially in touch with what is truest or what is best. A real ideal must always forgive the unideal, because in the unideal it must always detect a worship of, a striving after, itself. Even death—of Socrates or of Greek civilization, of any body or of any thing—cannot unsettle a real faith. Men may be prisoners in a cave, as the myth in the seventh book of the *Republic* would have them, but the bare fact that they can see the unsubstantial shadows of things is enough to insure them at some time their release and enlightenment.

Yet it must now be said, as has in fact been hinted already, that even Plato's faith was measured. Must we say that it was too true to the Greek spirit, and went only so far—not too far? Was it Greek moderation that held Plato to his dualism? That kept the ideal from being wholly cordial or hospitable to the real, or the real from resigning itself to the ideal? These are immoderately subtle questions perhaps; but certainly Plato was too near to the Athenian life, to the disasters and treacheries of that life, ever fully to overcome the repulsion with which it affected him. He could not forget the manner of the death of Socrates. For him the ideal world, therefore, had still to seem another world. Moreover also—although here to many may appear a hopeless paradox—in spite of that repulsion, he was too near to the almost blinding brilliancy of the Greek life about him; he was himself too good a Greek, too deeply an Athenian, not to paint his other world, the ideal of his poet's thinking, in Hellenic colors; and, painting it so, in just so far he betrayed or compromised both its reality and its presence. Nor could his doctrine of love or participation or shadows compensate for such betrayal. The real

ideal, actually present and alive even in Athens, could not have Hellenic form for the simple reason that Greek life itself, as has been shown here, was itself become Hellenic only outwardly. Inwardly it was already cosmopolitan; and the real ideal, accordingly, always bound for its reality to be hospitable without restraint, could be brought from the other world into this only as it fully identified itself with the cosmopolitan universal life.

Plato's idealism, then, was indeed realistic; but, being an aristocrat and an Athenian as well as an idealist, he never quite reached the supreme confidence. His realism fell short of the reality. Can any dualism, theological or philosophical, even while it speaks of love and aspiration, of good will and faith—always a waiting faith—ever quite compass reality? Can it ever escape being narrow, as even Plato's was Hellenic?

But Plato's idealism was said to be prophetic. It was prophetic because the ideas were not less motives than memories, and because, as real, they could not be wholly aloof from the life of this world or from actual conditions at Athens. A commanding sense of another world must always foretell the coming of some new dispensation in this world. Of what, then, in positive history was Plato a prophet? This question answered, the present study will have accomplished its purpose.

Plato was a Greek prophet—not accidental or providential, but inspired directly by the very life that had already set in among the Greeks—of the Roman Empire, of that in those days world-wide, cosmopolitan, humanly universal state, which did but make Plato's ideal materially present and real, and which undertook to carry out the compulsion that reality of an ideal always justifies. That universal life to which Athens had fallen—or risen?—which Socrates as an intellectual genius discovered and heroically revealed to his people, and which Plato portrayed with the confidence of an idealist, Rome achieved with the even more perfect faith, the supreme and spiritual realism of action.

Sometimes we are asked to take a blindly fatalistic view of history, as if nations rose and fell under the power of some force and destiny which they themselves have had no part in and can find no sanction for; but when we see a great genius like Socrates

or a great philosopher and poet like Plato so deepening his own Greek life as actually to translate it into an ideal which a conquering people subsequently fulfils, the fatalism loses its meaning. Socrates and Plato, even in the moment of death, by their acts and by their teaching quite belied fate, and made even death seem like opportunity and gain. Even the passing of Greek civilization was fulfilment, a liberation of the Greek spirit.

And, finally, in the *Republic* there is a doctrine to which special reference seems fitting, for it, too, in a way that must appeal strongly to any student of history, has the value of a prophecy of Rome. Thus Plato drew an analogy between the inner parts or phases of the individual self and the various classes of society. In the self he recognized three chief parts, appetite, will, and reason, and in society three corresponding classes, artisans, soldiers and law-makers. Similarly he might have said also that the self was a bundle of many impulses or instincts, such as the religious, the aesthetic, the intellectual, the political, and the industrial, and then have pointed out that in society there were just as many distinct classes to correspond, such as the religious class, the intellectual class, and so on. But the fact that such an analogy is drawn is more significant than the terms used to express it; for even while it made the two organizations, the individual and society, correspondent part to part, it also differentiated them in a momentous way. As belonging to the individual, the parts or instincts recognized were free and undefined, while as identified with the life of the various classes of society they were only such special developments, relative to place and time and nation, as the existing civilization had produced. In general, any distinct class in society always shows some phase or interest of our common human nature made the basis of a visible institution or profession and accordingly subjected to certain prescribed ways and laws, to a certain technique or ritual; and Plato's analogy can be appraised only with this general truth in mind. In that analogy we see man's untrammelled instincts set over against the confining institutions of a particular civilization, or man's universal nature opposed to only local and temporary embodiments of it. We see, for example, labor set over against established industries, political life against partisanship,

or religion against a reigning orthodoxy. While society was all things formally and narrowly and visibly, the individual was revealed as being all things invisibly and broadly or infinitely. But so to separate the individual from the established life of the time was to make him look beyond its local and temporal affairs to a new life, broader and deeper, in which all the old, old interests or impulses of his nature would find new embodiments, in which all the various edifices of civilization would rise, as it were, against the sky in some foreign land, on some new shore.

Of course Plato's ideas, native as these were to the mind of every man, were also terms in an analogy of the individual, not however merely to society, but to the whole complex sphere of life, to the natural as well as to the narrowly human environment. They implied such an analogy down to life's very minutest details, and they issued the same call for new life by bidding the local and particular, the visible and definite, to give way to the universal, the only passing shadows to the real and eternal. They gave to the personal individual the same superiority to whatever can pass away. But the simpler analogy of the individual's peculiarly human instincts to the various parts of a formally organized society has special interest here. In it, in its irresistible call for a new social organization that should be more imperial to human nature, one cannot fail to see, once more, the Platonic prophecy of Rome.

Did Plato himself foresee Rome? Yes and no. Plato saw the Holy City as a mirage in the sky. All in good time the freed Greek spirit, joining others on the same journey, would cross the seas to the new shore and, beholding even the great dome, enter into the life so miraculously—yet was there any miracle?—revealed to it.

An idealist, then, was Plato—a heroic idealist, confidently victorious over death; and in his idealism at once a liberator of the Greek spirit and a prophet, who, let it be specially remembered, in company with other prophets that have also meditated on death, has shown human history to be more than blind fate.